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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the "needs" approach as it is used in curriculum and program planning in continuing education. The paper is divided into six sections. Part 1, the introduction, examines the general issue of curriculum and program planning in continuing education, the conventional sources for curricula, and reasons for the attractiveness of the "needs" approach. Part 2 reviews the main types of needs as used in continuing education literature. After a number of the problems associated with using a needs approach in planning are discussed in detail in part 3, a model for gaining an overview of the process is suggested in part 4, and a brief case study illustrates the process (part 5). The final section considers the possible political orientations of the needs approach and reviews a framework for assessing these orientations. A bibliography is included. (The author is a New Zealander studying adult education in Sweden.) (KC)

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John Benseman

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John Benseman is a New Zealander who has worked as a primary school teacher, university correspondence tutor, adult literacy tutor, Community College tutor and continuing education researcher. During 1978-79 he was involved in a clientele survey of the Hawkes Bay Community College, the results of which were presented in a series of reports including a masterate thesis at Massey University. During 1979-80 he has been studying Swedish adult education, while based at the Department of Educational Research, Stockholm Institute of Education, Sweden.

THE ASSESSMENT AND MEETING OF NEEDS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

by
John Benseman

The purpose of the following paper is to examine the 'needs' approach as it is used in curriculum and programme planning in continuing education. The paper itself is divided into six sections,

(i) Introduction - this section examines the general issue of curriculum and programme planning in continuing education, the conventional sources for curricula and reasons for the attractiveness of the 'needs' approach.

(ii) Types of needs - a review of the main types of need as used in continuing education literature.

(iii) Problems of utilisation - in utilising the needs approach, the continuing educator is faced, throughout the process, with resolving many issues ranging from the general and abstract to the concrete and specific. Some of the more salient issues are examined and discussed.

(iv) A planning model - in the light of the previous sections, a planning model is proposed to provide an overview of this planning approach.

(v) Case study - to illustrate the model, a case study is described.

(vi) Political orientation and needs - this final section considers the possible political orientations of the needs approach and reviews a framework for assessing these orientations.

SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION

Past and Present Emphases

A large part of research and general discussion in the field of continuing education has been concerned with the matter of clientele - in particular, the focus has centered on who participates in continuing education programmes at present and their motivations for participation; who doesn't participate and why; who drops out and why; and how access to continuing education can be changed and/or extended. Justifications for why adults should participate in continuing education are usually assumed in these studies and discussions. Certainly, few writers have dared challenge the desirability of lifelong education[1)].

The fact that much emphasis to date has been placed on the issue of participation is probably attributable to two main factors,

(i) Firstly, because of the voluntary nature of continuing education, the clientele for any programme can never be assumed. That is, recruitment of learners is an essential prerequisite to all other considerations and hence deserves considerable attention. If nobody is recruited for a continuing education programme, then other factors (e.g. quality of presentation, evaluation) obviously become non-issues.

(ii) Secondly, as the writer (Benseman, 1979) has argued elsewhere, the issue of access to continuing education has a certain appeal to virtually all groups and individuals across the political spectrum. Regardless of one's political or philosophical stance, the question of access to continuing education has a certain universal appeal - albeit for differing reasons. These can range from placating potential revolutionnaires and concealing high unemployment figures to arousing the political and social awareness of the underpriveleged.

With much of the emphasis of research and discussion centred on opportunities and access, however, there has been a corresponding lack of attention on other issues. Unlike most other areas of education, scant attention has been paid to such issues as the design of curricula, the teaching process or evaluation studies. As Colin Griffin (1979:81) has recently commented - "There is indeed reason to think that continuing education is a policy of institutional provision rather than of actual educational processes and practices about which we surely need to know rather more and think rather harder if they are to be relevant to the kinds of problems which education can help to solve".

This paper looks in particular at the matter of programme and curriculum[2)] planning and in particular, seeks to critically review one of the most common approaches to programme planning and curriculum design - the 'needs' approach.

While much has been written on 'needs' in other educational circles, comparatively little has been written about this approach within the particular context of continuing education - although the same is also true of the whole issue of curriculum in continuing education (see for example Jarvis 1978).

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for such a paucity of discussion.

(i) Firstly, as stated earlier, research and discussion has largely been concerned with the more 'immediate' problems of access and opportunity.

(ii) Secondly, there is often an implicit assumption that much of continuing education is, in essence, an extension as the compulsory schooling sectors, with the exception being the maturity of the adult clientele. Thus, many continuing education programmes teach curricula similar to what is taught in secondary schools with perhaps some alteration in teaching style being the major concession to the adult clientele.

(iii) Thirdly, many teachers in continuing education (particularly those involved in vocational training programmes or those geared to external examinations) have little or no role to play in designing their curricula. The contents of programmes for these teachers is largely 'imposed' in terms of set requirements and syllabi (detailed plans of programme contents, usually designed at national level e.g. trade certification courses). Certainly few vocational teachers would feel they are in a position similar to those in the more amorphous area of 'community' or 'liberal' education, where programme contents are rarely 'imposed' on the institution (or even teacher/tutor) concerned.

(iv) Finally, the apparent disinterest in continuing education curricula may be seen as a desire by continuing educators (whether consciously or not) to avoid some of the furor that periodically surrounds, for example, university courses when they are publicly labelled as being politically-oriented - (e.g. the accusation by various English academics in 1977 that the Open University course on social inequalities was unnecessarily biased towards a Marxist analysis). Many continuing educators would undoubtedly prefer to avoid such public controversies[3] - especially at a time when continuing education, in many contexts, appears to be on the verge of becoming more accepted as an integral part of the educational mainstream.

Continuing education as a field continues to lead a rather precarious existence in most countries, where growth and development depend largely (at least to a greater degree than the compulsory and higher education sectors) on the current buoyancy of the economy and governmental policy. Along with the other "non-essential" activities such as pre-school education, continuing education's fortunes tend to rise and fall to a large extent with the nation's economic well-being. For example, cut-backs in social services are being experiences at present in a number of countries (e.g. Britain, New Zealand) as well

as the implementation of 'user-pays' policies. Continuing education, and especially non-vocational continuing education, is usually one of the first social service sectors to be affected by reductions in budget spending. The precarious nature of the field's development thus probably makes continuing educators more cautious in their operations than their counterparts in other educational sectors.

Regardless of the reasons for the lack of critical debate over continuing education curricula, it is apparent that it is timely for increased public discussion and research on issues beyond the question of client recruitment. Critical introspection regarding curriculum in continuing education is all too rare an activity it would appear.

Questions as to why teach various subjects/disciplines, what types of knowledge are worthwhile and so forth, are seldom asked - let alone answered. Most teachers/tutors are rarely placed in a position where they must justify course curricula (unless, of course, they fail to attract a sufficient number of clients).

Conventional Sources of Curricula

At the most general level, continuing educators usually draw on one or a combination of the following main areas as a source for planning programme curricula (Knowles 1957).

(i) the self-perceived needs and interests of the learners themselves, (e.g. hobby classes),

(ii) the requirements (or 'needs') of society, (e.g. training of tradespeople for the labour market),

(iii) the requirements (or 'needs') of the local community, (e.g. programmes for youth leaders),

(iv) the goals of a particular institution (e.g. Country Women's Institute),

(v) some recognised body of knowledge - 'subjects' or 'disciplines' (e.g. history, sociology).

Of these five sources, the 'needs' approach (i.e. variations of (i), (ii) and (iii) above) is probably the most frequently used. The veracity of this claim is confirmed by a number of British and American writers (see e.g. James 1956, Wiltshire 1973 and Monette 1977). In New Zealand continuing education, the use of the concept 'need' is widespread and statements about "meeting educational needs' and being "responsive to community and student needs" are readily found in policy statements and academic discussions as well as in specific programme brochures and prospectuses.[4] The ubiquity of the term world-wide is further confirmed in a cursory glance through virtually any continuing education policy statements, journal or publication.[5]

The use of the 'needs' approach to designing educational curricula can be traced back to the writings of John Dewey in the early twentieth century.

The advocating of the doctrine of 'needs' was, according to Atwood and Ellis (1971:210), essentially a reaction to traditional practices of planning curricula. The traditional subject-oriented curriculum was to be replaced by a learner-centred approach, where the "needs and interests" of the learner were to be considered paramount. Such an approach (often referred to as 'progressive education'), it was hoped, would 'humanise' education, in contrast to the foregoing traditional, authoritarian approach where the central focus was on the imparting of knowledge and consideration of the learner usually a secondary consideration.

Dewey's ideas have had considerable impact on most areas of education in the twentieth century. There are, however, a number of additional factors, relating to the distinctive features of continuing education itself, that help account for the widespread use of this approach among continuing educators.

The Appeal of the 'Needs' Approach

Firstly, as Lawson (1975:34) has pointed out, there is no traditional curriculum in continuing education to provide a guidline for programme planners. Without such guidelines, continuing educators have greater freedom to design their own educational programmes - a situation which greatly enhances the use of the more 'open-ended' and flexible needs approach.

Secondly, as was pointed out earlier in this discussion, continuing education deals primarily with people who participate voluntarily in the various educational programmes. Although some participants are initially 'directed' (e.g. as a requirement of trade training programmes), they are, at all times, essentially free to "vote with their feet" and withdraw if they so wish. Unlike other sectors of education, where educators can assume a 'captive' audience (this does not necessarily mean a motivated or co-operative audience, but at least the physical presence of the participants is normally assured), continuing educators have, of necessity, always given high priority to relating programmes to known interests of prospective clients. The close linking of clients' interests and programmes is seen as an essential requisite in initially attracting a clientele and then, subsequently retaining them. In qualification-oriented programmes - where the reward of receiving some form of qualification is normally a sufficient inducement to recruit prospective participants and does not rely heavily on the intrinsic interest of the programme itself, the interests of the clients are less likely to be considered as an inducement factor in clientele recruitment. These types of programmes thus tend to draw more frequently on the various 'forms of knowledge' for their curricula than on the expressed interests of the clients as the participants. This is not to argue that student interests are totally neglected in these programmes, but rather, they are not considered to the same degree as in non-qualificational courses, as a means of attracting the clientele.

Thus, the extensive reliance on the needs approach is, at least in

part, attributable to the fact that the continuing educator must always bear in mind that unless the programme participants concur with the organiser on the interest and relevance of the curricula, then the programme may never eventuate due to the lact of participants. Certainly the bureaucratic credo of equating programme justification with roll numbers ("the numbers game") does little to dispel the cogency of this type of argument.

Secondly, the appeal of the needs approach is also related to what Wiltshire (1973:30) calls the concept's "comforting air of scientific hard-headedness". Many continuing educators assume the premise that continuing education can, and indeed should operate from a politically neutral base. For example, a recent survey by Fordham et al. (1979: 182) regarding aims and objectives in adult education showed that tutors rated political aims ('to help students become politically aware') the least important of eleven options. The desirability of such a stance is (ironically) politically expedient in many contexts, as funding for overtly 'politically-oriented' programmes is often difficult at best, and impossible quite often (unless of course, if the programme's and the funding body's political orientation are similar) - witness for example the withdrawal of New Zealand Government support for CORSO when the latter group showed signs of becoming openly critical of Western economic structures and less content with playing the traditional (and politically acceptable) role of 'charity dispenser'. Thus the "politically-neutral" educator generally stands a much better chance of attracting a more constant source of funding, regardless of the surrounding political climate.

The 'overtly-political' continuing educator, in contrast, leads a more precarious existence in terms of gaining funds and avoiding public controversy. The scarcity of people who could be categorised in this latter category tends to confirm that

(a) the belief of operating from a 'value-free' or politically-neutral base is more expedient in our society, or

(b) most continuing educators genuinely believe that it is

both desirable and possible to be truly neutral in their role as continuing educators or

(c) many are simply not aware of the differences and merely conform to the dominant (i.e. 'value-free') pattern around them.

And yet, as the following discussion will illustrate, all education is inevitably political by nature and therefore, the use of the needs approach involves the infusion of the educator's values as much as any other alternative. Furthermore, basing curricula on people's needs is much more problematic than is generally acknowledged. The following two sections therefore outline the main uses of the term need and point out some of the difficulties involved in its utilisation.

Footnotes

1) Notable exceptions to this are John Ohliger's article 'Is lifelong education a guarantee of permanent inadequacy?' - Convergence Vol. VII, No. 2, 1974 p 47-59, and Asher Deleon's 'Adult Education as a corrective to the failure of formal education' - Prospects, Vol. VIII, No. 2, 1978, p 169-176.

2) Although the term 'curriculum' now often refers to the whole learning situation (Lawton 1973:11) the term is used synonymously in this text with the term 'programme' - that is, the actual content of the learning experience, usually some form of knowledge, attitude and/or skill.

3) Witness the "Truth" (N.Z.) articles (July 1979) when the Hawkes Bay Community College offered courses of a non-traditional nature (women's health courses) and the College was branded as a 'sex college'.

[4] See for example, J. Adcock (1974:122) with reference to WEA; National Party Election Policy (1975:4); Educational Development Conference (1974:96); historical accounts of New Zealand continuing education - Thompson (1945:316); leading educational administrators - Renwick (1973:19, 1976:7); a Community College director - Harré (1975:9); UNESCO report on Lifelong Education (1972:13).

[5] See for example International Dissertation Abstracts; 'Recent Developments and Trends in Adult Education Policy' - European Bureau of Adult Education, Newsletter 1/2; 'Adult Education on the threshold of the 1980's' - National Swedish Board of Education.

SECTION TWO - TYPES OF NEEDS

As with many other concepts or terms used in discussions about education, the concept of 'need' is used with a wide variety of meanings. The meanings can be categorised in a number of ways. Monette (1977: 117), in an exhaustive review of the major continuing education texts and journals, categorised the implicit and explicit definitions of the term need into four main groups.

(i) a bio-psychological state that is non-observable or inferred and yet, is apparently innate, or 'natural' to all individuals. The intensity of the various bio-psychological needs may vary in intensity from culture to culture as well as individually within each culture. This category resembles the concept of 'drive' - as used for example in Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs where all human beings are believed to have a number of organismically-based needs arranged in five hierarchical[1] 'stages'.

Such bio-physical needs are not socially learned, but are innate and therefore common to every human being, although the satisfaction (or meeting) of these needs is open to a wide variety of options - e.g. cross-cultural differences in curing pain - Western medicine, acupuncture, herbal remedies etc.

(ii) a need in the sense of 'want', 'interest', or 'desire'. This category, often referred to as 'felt' or 'expressed' needs, suggests a means of gratification in order to achieve an ultimate goal (e.g. Person X states he needs to learn to play chess in order to fill his leisure time more enjoyably and (ultimately) become a 'better' person). This use of the term need is, for example, widely used in community education in New Zealand and is consistent with 'service policy' orientation. It should be noted, however, that the use of this interpretation is dependent on the learner correctly identifying his/her own needs and being

able to express them cogently - an ability that is obviously not shared to the same degree by all social groups.

(iii) a 'normative' need. Groups or individuals are judged to fall below a certain desirable standard (or norm) and these people are thereby classified as being 'in need' - e.g. many women wishing to re-enter the workforce are said to be in need of greater self-confidence as well as other skills of a more technical nature. That is, their levels of self-confidence are judged to be below a certain desirable standard and they are therefore in need of certain educational experiences to improve in these competencies. The use of this type of need is often connected with 'allocation policy' programmes aimed at achieving social justice - e.g. Sweden's emphasis on catering for the (normative) needs of the undereducated or the Hawkes Bay Community College's (N.Z.) concern for the (normative) needs of women, Maoris, drop-outs and rural people.

The normative standards set in these cases can never be absolute, but are set arbitrarily by persons who are deemed to be in position to be able to make judgement in such matters - e.g. politicians, community education organisers. There may be disagreement among various 'experts' or consultant assessors (e.g. what level of confidence do women need to be able to effectively re-enter the labour force - if at all?), and clearly such judgements rarely, if ever, have an objective base, but inevitably rely on a value base peculiar to each individual consultant assessor concerned.

There may, however, be differing levels of 'expertness' among the persons concerned (e.g. the degree to which decisions are based on documented evidence), but all these judgements presuppose a value base nevertheless, and can therefore never be value-free.

Somewhat similar to 'normative' needs, 'comparative' needs involve the comparison of the characteristics of these in receipt of a service with others who are not. If these others exhibit the same characteristics and are not receiving the service, they are said to be 'in need'.

(iv) Other variants of the term need - variations according to the degree of specificity; categorisation according to how the need is best met (e.g. educational vs. health needs); and use in the form of slogans ("our programmes meet the needs of the community"!).

In addition to Monette's four categories, two further types of need warrant mention. Firstly, a distinction is sometimes made between

(a) individual needs ("Person X needs to improve her communication skills"), and

(b) societal or community needs ("Area Y needs more courses for the unemployed").

Secondly, a further variation of the term widely used is 'real need'. Even when not stated explicitly, this meaning of the term need is often at least implicit when used in an educational context. Atwood and Ellis (1971:212) define a 'real' need as an objective deficiency in an individual, group or community in relation to the environment. The emphasis is upon the fact that the deficiency actually exists, as distinct from one that is only thought to exist. A 'real need' may or may not be recognised by the person who has the need, but this does not alter its 'realness'.

In relation to the lack of awareness of the part of the person in need, Atwood and Ellis also talk about 'symptomatic needs'. By this, they mean that a person's 'expressed' needs may in fact be misleading, in that they are indicators or symptoms of needs at another level - namely, their 'real' needs (e.g. a person expressing a need for asprin may be symptomatic of a more serious (or real) need - the need for

relaxation etc.) By making this distinction, Atwood & Ellis are essentially pointing out the inadequacy of felt needs as a means of discovering 'hidden' truths or realities and the inevitability of interpretation in this area.

The distinctions made thus far between the different interpretations of the term need may appear to be somewhat overdrawn and yet careful examination of the concept and its meanings is essential in understanding its present usage, its limitations, as well as its potential as a basis for programmes and curriculum planning in continuing education. Having detailed some of the ways in which the concept of need has been used, the discussion now turns to discuss some of the problems associated with its use.

Footnotes

1) In brief, Maslow says that needs of the lower, more basic stages must be met, at least in part, before needs of a higher level (e.g. feelings of self-confidence, self-fulfillment etc.) can be met. Thus, a learner is not interested in trying to satisfy higher-level needs such as self-actualisation when s/he is hungry or thirsty (lower-level needs). Fordham et. al's. (1979) work in non-formal education at Leigh Park points out (p. 195) the importance of satisfying basic needs, such as self-confidence, before 'higher-level' needs can be met. In particular, the authors argue (p. 194) the importance of educators becoming involved in this 'grey area' of overlap with social work as a pre-requisite for involving greater numbers of people who traditionally do not participate in continuing education.

SECTION THREE - PROBLEMS IN UTILISING THE 'NEEDS' APPROACH

Despite its widespread use of continuing educators, there is little open debate of issues associated with utilising the needs approach. Indeed, it is rare to find any explanation as to why this particular approach was chosen, reasons for the assessment method used in the programme or discussion of specific problems arising during the process.

The following section therefore seeks to identify and discuss some of the more salient issues that confront the educator using people's needs as a basis for planning educational programmes. To facilitate discussion, the section is broken into the following sub-sections, each corresponding with the sequential stages of the planning process -

(a) defining the need,

(b) who assesses the needs,

(c) how to assess needs,

(d) the rating and selection of needs,

(e) meeting the needs,

(f) needs and values.

Before discussing more specific issues however, it should be noted that at a general level, one of the most important problems associated with the use of the concept of need is that its use commonly blocks further critical analysis. Wiltshire (1973:26) contends that such concepts act as 'premature ultimates' - "assumptions or concepts which have a spurious finality and which therefore silence questions which need to be raised and block off routes of inquiry which it would be profitable to follow". Stating that a programme aims "to meet the community's educational needs" has a somehow final and self-evident ring of certitude about it that effectively stifles further debate, rather than stimulates further examination and discussion.

Associated with the use of the needs approach to educational planning are a number of issues that require elaboration and clarification.

(a) - Defining the Need

Firstly, there is the matter of explicating the type(s) of need with which one is concerned. As has been shown in the proceeding discussion, there are a wide variety of possible meanings of the concept, each of which has different implications for its utilisation. In defining the concept more narrowly, it becomes possible to understand more fully the limitations (and possibilities) associated with each category of need.

Defining a need more narrowly, however, is not always an easy task. Each of the definitions given in this paper is not mutually exclusive and many overlap to some extent. For example, a person may express a need to learn to read, which may also be confirmed by an educator as a real need for that individual, as well as being seen as a normative need in the community (i.e. that all adults need to be able to read). On the other hand, a learner may never express a need to learn to read (for a veriety of reasons) and yet others (politicians, community leaders, educationists etc.) may interpret this individual's needs very differently - that is, they infer that the individual is not aware of his/her real needs.

The very fact that someone does not express any needs may in fact be interpreted as an indicator for various 'real' needs e.g. the need to be able to communicate etc. - R.D. Laing (1969) expressed it this way -

He does not think there is anything the matter with him because
one of the things that is
the matter with him
is that he does not think that there is anything
the matter with him
therefore
we have to help him realize that,
the fact that he does not think there is anything

the matter with him
is one of the things that is
the matter with him.

More explicit uses of the term need can also help clarify the task to be undertaken in the educational programme. For example, stating that a programme aims to "identify and meet the needs of general practitioners", begs a number of questions - namely, what sorts of 'needs'? - personal, professional or a combination of both? - to what degree can a person's personal needs be divorced from his/her vocational needs? Implicitly, what is probably meant in this particular case is the 'professional needs of general practitioners that can be met by some form of education'. This latter definition provides a clearer boundary of the area that the programme will cover and avoids much of the ambiguity of the former statement, though even the latter is by no means adequate as it stands.

Each category of need outlined earlier has accompanying issues ranging from the practical to the philosophical that must be confronted at some point,

- how can the educator satisfy needs of a bio-psychological nature and what level of bio-psychological needs is to be considered satisfactory?
- to what extent are expressed needs synonymous with real needs?
- how can one justify the interpreting of another's needs, particularly when the individual concerned has a different view of his/her own needs?
- when is an expressed need to be interpreted as a symptomatic need?

Clearly, defining the concept of need more narrowly does not provide answers to these questions, but it does, however, serve the important task of exposing some of the issues involved.

(b) - Who assesses Needs?

Having defined the operational meaning of the concept of need, the ensuing problem to be solved is - who is the best assessor of a need? The answer to such a question, depends to a large extent on the type of need in question.

By definition, only the learner him/herself can indicate expressed needs. And yet, even in this case, there are other problems to overcome - how does the educator gain 'access' to people's expressed needs? Some groups experience little difficulty in making their needs known, while others express theirs less publicly and less often.

Total reliance on people's ability to express a need has ramifications in other areas also. For example, dependence on expressed needs can influence the make-up of the clientele attracted to an agency. Results from a recent national survey of continuing education in New Zealand (1979:18), show a distinct variation in the likelihood of being able to identify an unmet need according to the respondent's social characteristics. Three-quarters of the professional workers in the sample claimed they had an unmet need, while 65% of the skilled and semi-skilled were in the same category. In the unskilled repetitive group, 60% expressed an unmet need and this figure diminished yet further (to 34%) for retired persons.

If an educator were to treat these results at face value programmes planned as a result would, in all probability, be geared to, and subsequently attract the 'old brigade' of the socially priveleged as its clientele. According to the logic of this approach, it is the social élite who have the greatest need for further education - a notion which is highly suspect and contentious to say the least!

The problem of deciding who can assess needs is even more problematic in regard to the other definitions - e.g. who is capable (and on what grounds) of deciding which norms are desirable or appropriate when assessing normative or comparative needs?

Ethical considerations

In general, the use of anyone apart from the learner him/herself to assess the learner's needs is interpreted by some philosophers and educators as ethically wrong. This view involves the belief that it is ethically wrong for the educator to 'impose' his/her views or interpretations (no matter how 'well-informed' they may be) on the learner. Rather, it is the learner who has the sole right to determine what constitutes a need, whether or not this should be met and in what ways. Interpreting others' needs is seen as tantamount to a denial of the learner's personal freedom and sense of autonomy. It is interesting to note, that this type of objection is rarely raised in other spheres of education. This is probably due largely to continuing education's clientele being (i) voluntary, and (ii) adult.

In contrast to this group, are those who believe that people vary in the degree to which they are capable of critically evaluating their own life-situation and suggesting ways of altering this. Drawing on the findings of various research studies, they argue that there is tremendous variation in people's biological, and psychological make-up as well as their social environment. These factors influence a person's ability to make critical self-evaluations (or needs assessments) and to recognise and utilise ways of overcoming difficulties (or satisfying one's needs). The ability to accurately assess and express needs is, therefore, not universal, but varies tremendously among individuals and social groups.

Hence, they argue, some people are not always capable of assessing their own needs, initially at least, and may require the help of another person, who because of his/her particular expertise is able to identify the learner's needs more accurately. Such help does not necessarily infringe on the individual's right to self-determination, nor does it necessarily involve the imposition of one person's values on another. Rather, it merely recognises the fact that some people lack a critical self-awareness that is necessary in assessing one's own life situation in a realistic manner.

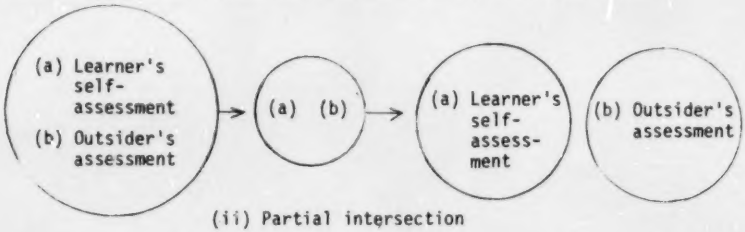
Thus, the sets of expressed and real needs may vary from

(i) complete intersection, where the learner's and the outsider's assessments coincide totally, through

(ii) degrees of partial intersection, to

(iii) being disjoint sets, where the two assessments are completely different.

These combinations, represented diagrammatically are shown below.



(ii) Partial intersection

(i) Complete intersection (ii) Disjoint sets

Diagram 1

The identification of a learner's needs by an outsider (usually referred to as a consultant assessor or 'expert') is often used in relation to the term real needs - implying that the outsider, or consultant assessor (the 'expert') is able somehow to objectively identify and quantify the learner's needs (which are seen as having distinctively 'subjective' connotations) as they exist 'in reality'.

The debate over the reliability of expressed needs as accurate indications of real need is, not surprisingly, one in which there is a wide variety of opinions located somewhere on the continuum of possibilities shown in the preceding diagram. Most, however, would probably agree that real and expressed needs are neither synonymous nor disjoint (except in some exceptional cases) but that they do, in fact,

overlap to some degree. The degree to which they overlap will vary from group to group, individual to individual, according to various factors of previous education, social milieu and so forth. In other words, individual judgement of these factors alone, can ultimately determine the reliability of judging the degree of overlap between the two categories of needs.

Unfortunately, there appears to be few empirical studies that have endeavoured to measure the degree to which learners' expressed (or felt) needs overlap with real needs.

Related research

Hiemstra and Long's (1974) survey of physical therapists' felt needs ("personal perceptions symptomatic of problems") and real needs ("actual knowledge or skill weaknesses")[1] is interesting in this respect. The writers concluded (1974:277) that "there are notable differences between what a therapist perceives as his or his felt need and what is demonstrated to be real need", and "... personal perception of what courses would meet needs does not automatically equate with actual job-related needs". Furthermore, the writers stress the complexity of needs assessment and advocate the use of more than one indicator and/or technique. Finally, they suggest that additional research and application is required in order to gain a clearer understanding of this type of procedure.

Assessment of need then can be undertaken by a number of different people - including various combinations of the learner and consultant assessor(s).

(i) The learner

(ii) The consultant assessor(s) - people judged to have particular skills or competence, by virtue of their particular experience, education or vantage point. Such 'expertise' enables these people to assess particular groups' needs in various ways that provides information on the learner's

needs that would not ordinarily be available from everyday sources. The consultant's assessment of need may coincide to varying degrees with that of the learner. Examples of this category of assessor include community workers, social researchers, educational administrators, politicians, social workers, leaders of commerce, industry and so forth.

The decisions, however, regarding the operational definition of expertise, the subsequent choice of consultant assessors and the degree to which the two types of assessment are utilised rest ultimately with the continuing educator. Seldom are these decisions straightforward and they inevitably involve rating the assessment sources differentially in some way. The sole responsibility for making these judgements usually lies with the continuing educator, whether the role is acknowledged or not, and thereby ultimately reflect his/her particular skills, knowledge and values.

(c) - How to Assess Needs

Having identified the type of need in question and decided what sources are to be used in identifying the needs, the next problem to be confronted involves the methods used in identifying the learner's needs. Once again, the solution to this problem varies according to the type of need with which the educator is concerned.

Assessing needs can be done in a variety of ways, ranging from market-research style, scientific surveys through to much more informal methods.

McMahon (1970) provides a brief overview and discussion of the main methods used to determine people's needs. Unfortunately, the author makes no attempt to assess the relative merits of the different methods. Briefly, they include,

(i) The community study. Blackwell (1967) says the main dimensions to be considered in such a study include the popula-

tion base, the institutional structure, the value systems, the social stratification system, informal social relationships, the power structure and the ecology of the community. Some writers (see for example, Hand (1968), Hoiberg (1955), have compiled detailed checklists designed to give the educator a comprehensive overview of the target population, while others (for example, Warren 1955) have given guidelines for organising community surveys designed to achieve this goal.

(ii) Listening posts - often used in conjunction with advisory committees. The former are concerned with gathering information directly from the public, while the latter method utilises the perspective of persons judged to have particular expertise in some area relevant to the designated topic (e.g. reading advisors in adult literacy programmes).

(iii) Power structure. This term is used to describe the procedure of surveying the 'power structure' of a community - consisting of business, government, civic associations and 'society' activities (Hunter (1953)). The main difficulty associated with this method lies in the problem of determining the locii of power in the community, while the main criticism of it centres on the fact that it ignores the views and opinions of the power-less.

(iv) The Whittler. Similar to the idea of the listening post, - this method involves the assessor sitting (and whittling to 'legitimise' his/her presence) near a recognised centre of social activity, such as a library, a hotel bar or a general store, and listening to people's conversations.

The conservations are interpreted by a 'whittler' as expressions (directly or indirectly) of people's concerns, which in turn, give an indication of their educational needs. Presumably, the frequency and intensity of their expressed concerns are taken as indicators of the degree of need, which in turn indicates the priorities for any subsequent educational programmes.

While such a method might be suggested by some to be a little 'tongue in cheek'[3], this method (or variations of it) shares a number of associated problems in common with even the most scientific, 'hard-headed' method.

As several writers have pointed out (Atwood and Ellis 1971, Monette 1977), the assessment of people's needs is impeded by a number of factors, each of which must be kept in mind when designing and implementing assessment procedures.

The changing nature of needs

Because people's lives are in a constant process of change due to external (e.g. social and physical environment) and internal (e.g. psychological and biological changes associated with the process of ageing) factors, so too are their needs in a constant state of flux. People's needs not only vary from group to group and individual to individual, but also over the dimension of time. Needs may change as a result of natural, unplanned factors over which the individual has little or no control, but also as a result of deliberate, planned changes - for example, learner's needs usually change, in both type and intensity, as a result of taking part in educational programmes. That is, because a programme is successful in changing some aspect of the learner's skills, knowledge or beliefs (i.e. the aim of education), his/her needs also subsequently change. Indeed, the fact that all people have on-going, ever-changing educational needs throughout the life cycle is central to the justification of the tenet of continuing education.

Monette (1977:118) also points out that normative standards (the basis for assessing normative needs) also change with time, "depending on developments in knowledge and changes in the values of society".

Thus, the assessment of needs must be a continuous process if it is to take into account the dynamic, shifting nature of needs. 'One-shot' efforts to assess needs run the risk of overlooking, to some degree

at least, people's changing environment and their on-going personal development.

Interpreting statements of need

At a more concrete level, there is also the problem of matching and comparing statements or assessments of need. The problem here is more straightforward but is important nonetheless. Essentially, it centres on the fact that each individual, although in theory sharing a common means of communication, expresses and interprets the spoken and written word in a highly individual way. Simply stated, words can denote and connote different things to different individuals. Two people expressing a need in identical terms may be attempting to communicate two different meanings. Conversely, two people may express the same meaning in two entirely different ways.

The person assessing needs is therefore continually confronted with the dilemma of interpreting and equating people's meanings. Some people may express their needs at a very abstract, generalised level, while others may express theirs in a more concrete way. Taken to extremes this type of argument can be interpreted as saying individuals have no common reference point, which is, of course, untrue. Suffice to say, however, that the variation in meanings possible in any form of communication, makes for additional problems that must be considered in the assessing and interpreting of people's needs as a basis for planning educational programmes.

The problem here is similar to the one confronted by educators endeavouring to advertise their courses or programmes. The choice of a course's title is crucial in conveying the course's intent to the prospective learners; and yet, regardless of how carefully an ad is worded, some will enrol believing the course to be aimed at something else, while others who would be interested in the course contents, mistake it to be of something outside their interests or ability.

(d) - Rating and Selection of Needs

Regardless of the assessment methods used, the continuing educator will almost certainly discover a greater number of educational needs than what resources can meet, even over an extended time period. Therefore, the continuing educator is next faced with the dilemma of judging the value and the ranking of learners' needs (which in turn leads to the differential ranking of the learners themselves). The resulting ranking of needs then serves as an indicator for allocating resources (whether at a national or local level) and timetabling priorities. Or, put another way, continuing educators cannot satisfy all educational needs, so s/he must somehow decide on which needs are to receive priority and the amount of resources to be used when planning the deployment of the agency's resources.[3)]

Thus, whether aware of it or not, each continuing educator uses some set of criteria for deciding on the value and priority of the needs to be met. The judging and ranking of needs thereby inevitably involves the continuing educator's values in deciding whose (and which) needs are worthwhile. The resultant priorities do not somehow mysteriously evolve on their own - they are the result of the planner judging X to be more worthwhile than Y on the basis of certain values deemed to be important by the planner. Such values will vary from individual to individual and may or may not be laid open to public scrutiny. They may also vary from thinly-veiled prejudices to elaborate, logical statements backed by a range of supporting evidence.

For the planner who believes that expressed needs are inherently worthwhile, there are still a number of issues to be confronted. This approach does not solve the problem of which needs are to receive priority from the list of expressed needs. For while the use of expressed needs avoids most of the difficulties usually associated with judging the comparative merits of say, teaching trade skills and courses of a more esoteric nature, there are nonetheless, some situations where expressed needs are particularly problematic. What if the learner expresses a need to learn some things that are clearly

intended to break society's laws (e.g. teaching arson skills), transgresses dominant social mores (e.g. teaching racial intolerance) or are simply trivial (e.g. learning to recite lists of telephone numbers)? Obviously few planners would give priority or even tolerate these extreme sorts of needs, and yet where is the line to be drawn? - what is acceptable and what is not? What sorts of criteria are to be used in deciding these issues?

For those planners using other types of needs assessment or various combinations (e.g. use of expressed needs as well as various experts' assessments) there are other problems to be faced. If the assessment of the learners' needs by the consultants are dissimilar from those of the learners themselves, the continuing educator must then decide which set of needs are the more 'accurate', and therefore more deserving of priority. Obviously, the learners' own assessments cannot be ignored, if only for the fact that potential clients are less likely to even participate if they see the programmes as being unrelated to their interests. On the other hand, if the consultant's assessments are seen as valid sources of information on the learner's needs, they too cannot be ignored completely. The obvious conclusion is that both views are important, but the final decision as to whose views are the more credible or valuable rests with the continuing educator alone.

Common to all needs approaches, however, is the problem of gauging the 'intensity' of needs. In deciding priority lists for the allocation of resources, there is the problem of solving the measurement of the degree of the merit of the different educational needs. This problem is not only related to the priority ordering of needs but also deciding the amount of resources to be allocated to the different assessed needs. As with deciding on the priority rating of needs, decisions relating to the amount of resources to be allocated for meeting the assessed needs are also made usually by the continuing educator and reflect a certain value base and philosophy. Decisions regarding the value and merit of any educational need can never be made in a vacuum, but are made by educators who are socially, histori-

cally and psychologically 'located' - that is, they are as much social products as anyone else and like their fellows, their actions reflect personal biases, values and beliefs.

(e) - Meeting the Needs

Having assessed the nature, degree and priority of the learner's needs, the final stage in the planning process is to design and implement the means for meeting the needs. The main difficulty of this stage relates to the fact that, as James (1956:19) says, "needs do not themselves point to any particular form of satisfaction".

Needs can be met in a multitude of ways, some of which may involve education. Obviously, continuing educators are mainly concerned with educational needs (i.e. those needs that can be satisfied by means of a learning experience), but it is also important to realise that the role of meeting needs is not confined to educationists. Furthermore, there are also many varied ways of satisfying educational needs, each of which may be equally valid, appropriate and effective.

Being able to recognise a need then, is not sufficient in itself. The educator must also be able to organise learning experiences that will, in fact, meet the learner's need. The difficulty of this task varies somewhat according to the nature and specificity of the need. The need for specific skills (e.g. learning to drive a bus) is more straightforward and less open to variation in methodology than more general, abstract educational needs (e.g. acquiring increased self-confidence). The latter example is much more open to variations in interpretation and could therefore be satisfied in an equally varied number of ways from courses in rock-climbing to involvement in T-groups.

In addition, there are the associated problems of deciding on the amount of educational experiences required to meet a need and, following the implementation of these, evaluating the degree to which the need has been satisfied.

The problems associated with meeting needs then, must be considered in addition to the difficulties encountered in the assessment of needs. How a need is to be satisfied is as open to variation as the means for assessing and rating the needs initially.

(f) - Needs and Values

As this discussion on the problems of planning educational programmes based on people's needs has attempted to show, the infusion of the educator's values is inevitable at all stages of the process from planning, through the assessment procedures, to the actual implementing of the various educational programmes themselves.

Simply stated, all education is predicated on the belief that the (potential) learner's present state of being is in some way deficient, or below a certain standard or level of performance. The educator undertakes the responsibility for organising learning experiences that will enable the learner to achieve a new, 'improved' standard or performance level. In all cases, these new, desired standards or levels are set or agreed to by the educator -that is, the educator makes, or at least confirms certain judgements as to what is desirable for the learner. That is, it involves moving from what is (the learner's present state) to what ought to be (the desired outcome of learning - a change in the learner's attitudes, knowledge or skills).

Monette (1979-84) therefore asserts that all needs assessments are governed by the normative canon - what should or ought to be done. The judging of what should be can never be determined solely within a scientific framework - that is, it can never be determined by any objective means but must always be derived from some value base. The scientific method with its (disputable) "value-free" qualities can, at best, only describe information of a factual nature. Descriptions of a normative nature (i.e. prescriptions of desired states/what should be) moves the debate into the area of philosophy - where 'truth' can only be written with a small 't'. Justifications for educational programmes thereby lose their air of scientific hardhead-

edness and become more vulnerable to open debate. That is, once educational programmes can no longer be promoted under the illusion of being somehow scientifically determined and consequently devoid of the educator's personal bias and values ('value-free'), then they enter the realm of politics and philosophy - areas of debate for which continuing education is not particularly renowned.

The popularity of the use of people's needs as a basis for planning programmes appears to have a particular attraction in continuing education, as it apparently relieves the educator of the responsibility of making judgements as to what should be taught as well as the how, where and when of planning. In reference to this issue, Wiltshire (1973:28) says, "we have the impression that these (needs) are objective and observable entities existing out there in the real world and that we have only to ascertain what they are and then to match our course or our programme to them".

But, just as Myrdal has argued in the social sciences, and Freire in education generally, this paper has argued, (as others have elsewhere - see e.g. Monette 1977, 1979; Atwood and Ellis 1971; Wiltshire 1973; James 1956; Griffith 1978) that the needs approach can never be truly objective or value-free. The educator must make numerous decisions throughout the planning process, each of which reflects, to some degree at least, his/her own bias and values. As James (1956:24) and Monette (1979:88) argue, there is "no escape from the educator's societal responsibility to make value choices in regard to educational activities. The philosophical justification of education is a necessary and inescapable responsibility. The educator must be able to justify his desire and mode of influence, his notion of the worthwhile".

Footnotes

1) The full definitions used (1974:273) were - "Felt need - the identification of an individual concern central to physical therapy by a selection of a course the therapist might participate in if given the opportunity; Real need (a) the selection by therapists of hypo-

thetical job-related situations that match personal experiences, and (b) the selection of correct or incorrect answers by therapists is a test on physical therapy knowledge or practice."

2) The point here being that just as social scientists use a variety of techniques for data-gathering, the continuing educator must also choose the method appropriate to the setting, e.g. the 'whittling method' may be the only technique suitable so some social groups or situations where other methods would be impossible.

3) The urgency and amount of resources deployed are generally a very reliable indicator of a sponsor's ranking of various groups' needs - e.g. the fact that there are only 4.65 full-time equivalent paid adult literacy tutors in New Zealand would tend to indicate that adult literacy is seen as a low priority area in continuing education. The low number of full-time tutors in continuing education generally (especially in non-vocational areas) is often related to continuing education's low status relative to other educational sectors.

SECTION FOUR - A PLANNING MODEL

Viability of Needs Approach

This discussion is concerned with examining the needs approach to planning the content of educational programmes and curricula. In particular, it has focussed on some of the difficulties associated with each stage of the planning process using this approach. A central point in the discussion has been the inevitability of the educator's values throughout the process.

The inevitability of values in this process and the critiquing of the approach in general however, does not mean that the method is without merit and unworthy of serious consideration by the continuing educator. Rather, it is hoped that the description and discussion of the approach's shortcomings will lead to a better understanding of the issues and difficulties involved and that this in turn, will lead to improved future utilization[1)] of this approach.

Therefore, this section turns to the problem of suggesting and explaining a model that will help provide an overview of the planning process based on people's needs. The central purpose of the suggested model is to provide a framework so that the process can be seen in its totality and also to help point out the difficulties associated with its use - some of which have already been discussed in the first part of the paper.

Before considering the model itself, it is important to firstly consider the 'actors' themselves in the piece - namely, the continuing educator, the learner and the 'experts' involved in the assessment of needs.

The 'Actors'

Each person in society is a social product. S/he has been socialised from birth by various socialising agencies - especially the family, friends, the school and mass media. Each person undergoes this process

and yet, because everyone comes under a number of different influences and to varying degrees of intensity each person emerges a unique human being, with different skills, attitudes, beliefs and values.

This is not the place to argue the degree to which a person's biological attributes are shaped by the social environment ('nature vs. nurture') - suffice it to say, that each person has differing social and psychological 'make-up' that profoundly influences that person's behaviour. Hence the diversity of life-styles so richly in evidence around us.[2)]

The important point to be made in reference to the present discussion, is that an individual can never fully set aside the influence of his/her social/psychological componentry when making decisions, forming judgements or opinions (assuming of course, that a person is even desirous of attempting this). All present behaviour is intricately enmeshed in the accumulation of a person's past experiences.

In brief, each of the persons involved in the planning and learning processes (educator, learner, assessor) acts, values and judges in ways that reflect their values, attitudes and beliefs which are in turn, a reflection of their respective social milieux and psychological conditionings.

Environmental Influences

However, in addition, a number of other situational factors influence (in terms of constraints or stimulii) people's behaviour. For example, the continuing educator's behaviour and judgements are not only influenced by his/her particular social/psychological make-up, but also by the institutional setting within which s/he operates. As an individual, s/he may have radical views (as a result of previous experiences and general socialisation) but is forced to moderate these somewhat because of the more conservative philosophy of his/her work situation (or vice versa).

People's behaviour then must always be considered in terms of,

(i) their personal values and beliefs which are a result of their accumulated social experience and

(ii) the environmental (or 'situational') framework within which they operate. Usually the place of employment, or sponsoring agency, this framework may also include 'wider' environmental factors such as the field of continuing education or the organisation and traditions of the national education system. The framework will vary in the degree to which it influences the individual's behaviour. The influence may be formalised (e.g. related to specific, written regulations) or informal (e.g. casual comments); overt (e.g. explicit directives from superiors) or covert (e.g. ostracism by fellow workers) and taken to extremes in the form of expulsion from the framework.

The following diagram illustrates these points

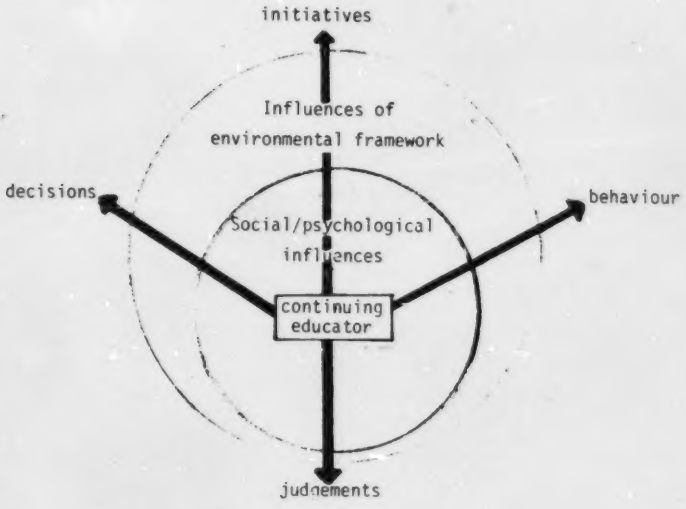


Diagram 2

In summary:-

(1) The individual is a social product. Attitudes, values and beliefs which form the basis for an individual's behaviour are formed and influenced by previous accumulated experience in conjunction with the process of socialisation.

(2) The social or institutional framework within which the individual operates can 'temper' his/her behaviour to varying degrees.

(3) Individual behaviour (decisions, judgements etc) must always be seen against the background of (1) and (2) above. That is, behaviour does not occur 'in vacuum' but is the end product of various social and environmental factors. Completely objective or value-free forms of behaviour are thus not possible in reality.

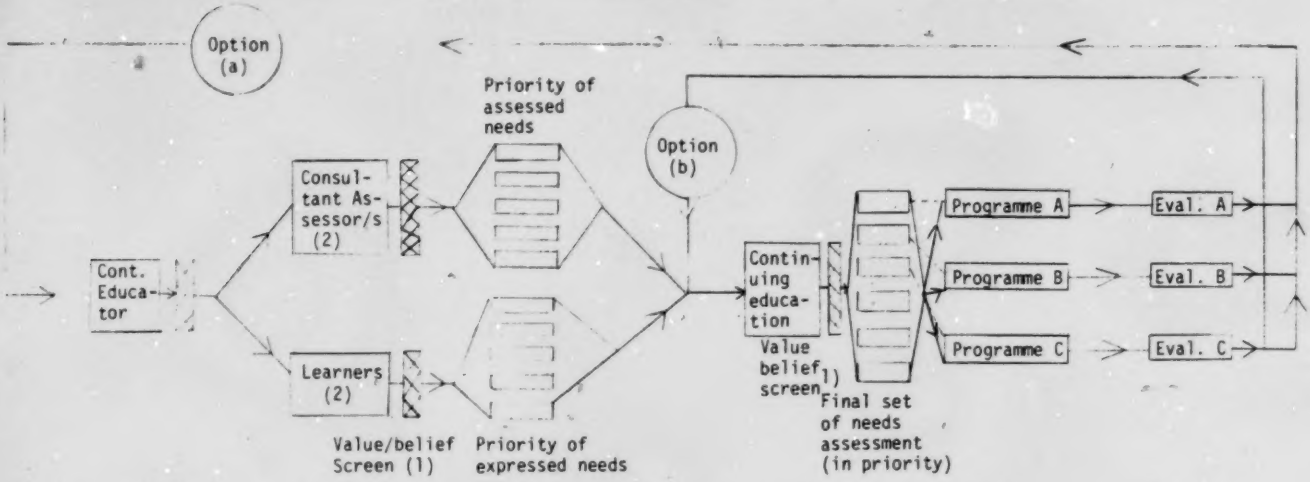
Needs - a planning model

The following model of programme/curriculum planning is predicated on the above statements and is equally applicable to all three main categories of personnel involved - continuing educator, learner and consultant assessor.

The planning process (Diagram 3) begins with the continuing educator who has ultimate responsibility for formulating programme aims and designing and implementing the educational experiences to achieve these aims. As has been pointed out already, the continuing educator brings to the process certain attitudes, values and beliefs that 'shape' his/her behaviour. These biases are also influenced to varying degrees by the environmental framework within which s/he operates.

The stimulus to initiate a continuing education programme may originate from a number of sources - for example, as a result of government policy, from institutional aims, from concerned community groups, the continuing educator or the learner. Irrespective of the source of the

Diagrammatic representation of Needs Approach to Curriculum/Programme Planning



(1) As indicated by (i) Analysis of present society
(ii) Conception of ideal society
(iii) Role of continuing education in bringing about (ii)
(iv) Environmental framework influences

(2) Utilisation of the two sources of assessment can vary from total relience to non-use.

initiative for the programme, it can be assumed that the continuing educator is, at least in part, sympathetic with the programme's aims. Is s/he were not (at least in part) sympathetic with the programme's aims then it is assumed the continuing educator would not participate in the programme.

Of course even the original choice of programme objectives, the target group involved (see for example, Fordham 1976) and all other preparatory steps are influenced by the values of the persons involved. For example, the Swedish (Social Democrat) Government's concern with providing continuing education for the educationally disadvantaged is related to this political group's concern for achieving increased social justice for the underprivileged of Swedish society. Likewise, Tanzania's giving official priority to programmes aimed at the less privileged (and at the obvious expense of other social groups - see Green 1977) is a clear manifestation of President Julius Nyrere's ideals regarding Tanzanian society.

Defining the Need

With the finalisation of staffing, the programme's aims and the identification of the potential clientele (Steps A and B), the continuing educator sets about the problem of assessing the target group's needs as they pertain to the particular programme. This particular sequence (aims/identification of clientele → assessment of needs → programme/curriculum planning) may vary slightly in some cases. For example, a general target group may be identified ('Community A') where an assessment of needs identifies specific target groups (a^1, a^2, a^3) which may then lead to the formulation of aims and identification of these groups' specific needs and so forth.

The first decision however, usually concerns the type of need to be used in operationalising the programme. This decision is dependent to some extent on the objectives set for the programme, but also on the continuing educator's assessment of various factors - e.g. are the learner's assessments of need considered a reliable source of in-

formation? If not, then clearly the educator is not concerned with expressed needs and will have to consider other types.

Assessment Sources

Even if the continuing educator does not specify the category of need being considered, s/he must consider the means for assessing the need and related to this, the sources for this assessment (Step C). As was pointed out earlier, the three main sources are those of (i) the learner, (ii) the consultant assessor (which can also include the continuing educator) and (iii) various combinations of (i) and (ii).

The decision as to which source is to be used rests ultimately on the judgement of the continuing educator, and is therefore influenced by his/her 'value/belief screen' (or 'philosophic screen' - Knowles 1970:125) a set of values which, as the foregoing discussion has pointed out, is inevitably involved in the decision process.

The process whereby values manifest themselves in behaviour is undoubtedly complex, but answers to the following three questions can act as crude, but effective indicators of the 'composition' of an individual's 'value/belief screen' (in the sense that the term is used in this discussion).

(i) What is the person's opinion of society as it stands at present?

(ii) In comparison with (i) above, what constitutes the 'good (i.e. ideal) society'?

(iii) What role should continuing education play in achieving the 'good society'?

However, as discussed previously, the individual's value/belief screen can also be influenced by environmental factors and therefore, these factors must also be considered when discussing influences on choices regarding assessment sources and so forth.

Preliminary Statements of Need

The 'composition' of the continuing educator's value/belief screen influences the decision as to which sources are to be used in the assessment of the learner's needs. The sources' assessments however, are also influenced by their respective screens. That is, whatever the source used for assessing needs (the choice of which is influenced by the educator's bias), the end results, or 'statement of need' (Step D), will always be affected by the bias or viewpoint of the person(s) involved.

Generally, the bias or limitations of the learner's self-assessment are readily acknowledged, but this observation must also hold true for the consultant assessor(s). That is, the outcome of the consultant assessor's work (D) is also filtered by a value/belief screen and, as such, represents not only an expression of his/her expertise, but also a manifestation of his/her particular values and ideals. These two elements can never be considered separately. Both statements of needs (D) therefore, must be examined and evaluated in this light.

At this point, the continuing educator has two (or one, if only one needs assessor is being used) sets of needs assessments (the learner's and the consultant assessor's) which are arranged in order of priority for utilisation. The continuing educator must, therefore, decide on a final set of needs (E), for the basis of specific programme planning (F). The decisions regarding this final set of priorities are again made through the continuing educator's value/belief screen.

Final Selection of Needs

If the two sets of needs assessment (D) coincide in content and order of priority, the selection of a final set of needs is reasonably straightforward (assuming that the educator accepts the validity of both assessment sources). When the two sets of assessments are disjoint however, (in content and/or priority) the settling on a final set (E) is more problematic. In this case, the educator must judge

which statement of need (learner or consultant) is the more accurate of the two for deciding the finalised set of priorities. The difficulty involved increases as the disparity between the two sets increases. Essentially, the educator has two options open in such cases:

(i) select one source over the other or,

(ii) seek a compromise between the two sets.

The grounds for choosing between options (i) and (ii) ultimately rests on the answer to the question - which set (or combinations thereof) is the more accurate set of needs assessment? The responsibility and means for answering the question lie, once again, with the educator.

Programme Design and Evaluation

Once a final set of needs is achieved, there follows the ensuing problem of designing learning experiences (F), in the form of educational programmes or curricula, appropriate to satisfying the set of identified needs. There may also be decisions to be made over the amount of resources to be allocated for the meeting of the needs. However, the setting of priorities (E) is a useful guideline in such decisions.

Once the educational programmes (F) have been implemented, evaluation procedures (G) evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes - that is, to what extent have the learner's needs been met? The answer to this question in turn can lead to,

(a) beginning the entire process (from point C) again. This option has the advantage of updating the learner's needs - advantageous in the light of their ever-changing nature (both as a result of the foregoing learning and other outside factors).

(b) Changing the original set of need assessments (E) in view of the changes shown in the evaluation process (H).

This option involves the writing of a new set of needs assessment without going through the complete process of selecting need assessors and so forth. Its main disadvantage is that it relies on re-ordering or adjusting assessments that were compiled sometime previously and may, therefore, be somewhat dated.

Because it gives an up-dated, more accurate assessment, option (a) is the more ideal option, but reality (lack of funds etc) probably dictates that option (b) is used in most cases.

Footnotes

[1] Certainly the consideration of the learner's expressed needs will remain an essential part of the planning process for as long as participation in continuing education is voluntary.

[2] This brief explanation of human behaviour certainly does no justice to the abundance and excellence of sociological and psychological studies that analyse these phenomena in great depth. Nonetheless, such an explanation is sufficient for the purposes of the present discussion.

SECTION FIVE - A CASE STUDY

In order to illustrate the process outlined in the model (Section four) the following case study is given (see Diagram Four). For a more detailed account of a project illustrating these points, the reader is referred to Fordham et al. (1979).

Person (P) is employed by a local community group to plan and teach continuing education programmes, particularly for the socially disadvantaged in the community (Step (a)). In brief, P is directed to 'assess and meet their educational needs'.

P as an individual has rather radical values. In terms of the three questions outlined previously -

(i) P believes present society to be essentially unjust - society's rewards are spread unevenly and many people are oppressed,

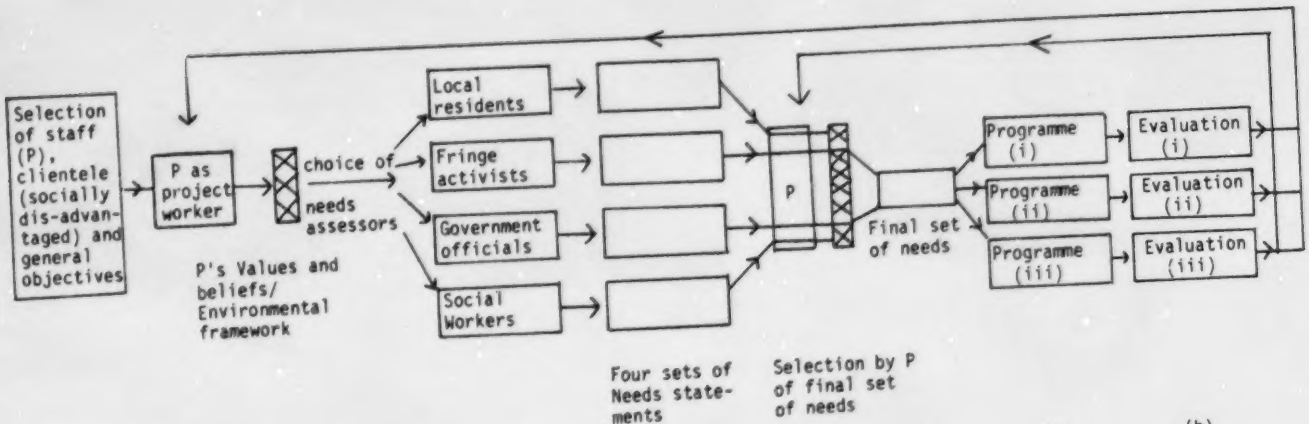
(ii) the 'ideal' society is one where people are self-determining and rewards are more evenly spread,

(iii) continuing education is seen by P as an important means of arousing people's (especially the disadvantaged) consciousness and learning skills etc appropriate to overcoming their state of oppression.

The employing body however, is more conservative in that it is seen in terms of adjusting individuals to the present social system. In terms of the Thomas and Harries-Jenkins framework (see following section) P is reformist-revolutionary, the employing body is maintenance-reformist in orientation.

P's task initially therefore, is to assess the educational needs of the socially disadvantaged in the community. From casual conversation with local residents, she hears that many people have difficulty in coping with 'officialdom' - in particular, government bureaucracies

Diagram 4 - A Case Study



with form-filling, making claims etc. Having gauged this normative need, (i.e. the target group's performance in these matters is below an acceptable standard of competence - as judged by P at this stage), P sets about assessing the need more extensively. She consults (Step (c))

(i) a randomly selected group of local residents (expressed needs),

(ii) several well-known 'fringe' activist leaders,

(iii) various local government officials and

(iv) various government-employed social workers.

The choice of (i)-(iv) above is influenced by P's personal values (e.g. wanting to show up the oppression of the target group), but is also tempered somewhat by the ethos of her employing body (i.e. the influence of her environmental framework) - hence the inclusion of several 'respectable' ((iii) and (iv)) consultant assessors.

As a result of this process, P has four sets of needs statements (d), varying somewhat in content and orders of priority. She therefore must make some judgements (Step (e)) as to which source(s) are the most reliable. Because she believes oppressed people are not really aware of their own needs (i.e. their expressed needs are judged by P to be symptomatic needs) and that local government officials are simply unaware of the target group's (real) needs, she draws more heavily on sources (ii) and (iv) in constructing a final set of needs (Step (f)). This set gives priorities which are then used as a basis for deciding the allocation of resources (how many courses, programmes etc) as well as timetabling priorities.

Based on the set of assessed needs, P organises (Step (g)) one major and two minor educational programmes ((ii) and (iii)).

Programme (i) involves setting up public information booths, phone-in services, courses on filling in tax forms etc.

programme (ii) involves in-service courses for government staff on helping clients etc,

(iii) takes the form of a series of radio programmes on citizens' rights, availability of services, concessions etc.

Evaluation (Step (h)) then shows P how effective these activities have been and the extent to which local residents' needs have been met in this particular field. On the basis of this assessment P then decides (in consultation with her employers) whether or not further activities on this topic are justified - that is, a re-assessment of the people's needs, in the light of the foregoing education programmes, marks the starting point of the process again.

Other Variations

Many variations on the above example are possible. For example, an organiser of vocational programmes may consult leading industrialists, academics and union organisations in trying to assess the vocational needs of apprentice electricians. The content of such a process may differ from the case study given, but it essentially follows the same sequence and encounters many similar problems - how to choose the consultant assessors, how to choose between the different sets of needs and so forth.

SECTION SIX - NEEDS AND POLITICS

Political Orientation

The final section of this paper examines the issue of political orientation in relation to the needs approach. A number of writers (e.g. Monette 1977, Bell and Courtney 1979:198) argue that the needs assessment procedure generally favours adjustment and "assumes the form of an ideological justification of the status quo".

However, it should be pointed out that this is only true of the needs approach as it is used by most educators at present. The approach is not inherently conservative. Rather, the point to be made is that it has tended to be used more frequently by educators with a conservative bias. In the opinion of the writer, the approach can be used for virtually every form of continuing education, regardless of political orientation.

These points can be illustrated with reference to two differing approaches to adult literacy - the radical philosophy of Paulo Freire on one hand, and the more conventional, functional literacy approach on the other.

Freire's Approach

Freire's analysis of relationships within society and between countries is well known (see for example Freire 1972). From the outset, Freire makes it abundantly clear that he identifies himself with the oppressed people of this world. This empathy also means standing against all that produces and maintains oppression - including the oppressors themselves. These values and beliefs are in turn reflected in his educational programmes. All education for Freire should be aimed at achieving 'conscientização' where the oppressed change from 'beings for others' to 'beings for themselves'. If education fails to achieve this goal of self-determination for the people, then it serves to maintain the status quo where the many are exploited for the benefit of a few.

Thus, it can be argued that Freire sees oppressed people as being in need of educational experiences that will lead initially to greater awareness of their oppression and ultimately, action to transform their situation. Although involvement of the learners in the process itself is seen as essential (otherwise the educator is exchanging one form of oppression for another), the initial assessment of people's political and educational needs is carried out by the educator (in association with a number of consultant assessors, sociologists etc.).

The educative process is aimed at making people aware of their own needs - an achievement which then makes it possible for them to become autonomous beings capable of making more meaningful decisions in the light of their newly-perceived reality. Because of the very nature of oppression, where the oppressed are so immersed in the 'culture of silence' that they internalise and mimic the values of the oppressor, the oppressed are not capable initially of perceiving their own needs. This ability is only possible when the educator has provided an initial input - a stimulus that enables the learner to realise alternative viewpoints and possibilities, hitherto unknown to him/her.

Freire's philosophy and methodology are clearly radical in nature in that they challenge the fundamental social, economic and political structures as they exist in many countries - East and West alike.

In brief, Freire's process

(i) starts with an analysis of people's needs by the educator,

(ii) leads to educational experiences designed to achieve objectives relating to conscientização, which at the same time, leads to

(iii) increasing self-awareness by the people to the point where they are capable of perceiving and altering their own life-situation.

Conventional Literacy Programmes

In contrast to Freire's approach, are the more conventional approaches to literacy in widespread use throughout the world.

These programmes also begin with an analysis of the learner's needs - namely, the need to 'read and write'. Unlike Freire however, this approach's aims are confined to actual 'mechanics' of reading and writing. While Freire would maintain that the learner needs to learn to 'read the world' - that is, use the skills of literacy to facilitate interpretation and change, the latter is concerned with reading and writing the written word only. These skills are to be used by the learner within his/her present social position and are not used to challenge existing structures. Any social change resulting from these new skills is both unplanned and independent of the programmes' aims.

While a conventional literacy programme may teach a learner to read the sentence - "José works every day in the vineyards", Freire would advocate the interpretation of such a statement. The reading of the statement leads to the questioning of José's environment - why he works every day, and so forth. Reading is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Both of these approaches, it can be argued, start with an analysis of the learner's needs and yet they obviously set out to achieve very different aims. That is, their methodology (needs analysis, leading to the design of educational programmes etc.) is comparable - their differences (which are considerable) lie more in the objectives which they seek to attain.

Using people's needs (however this is interpreted) as a basis for planning the content of educational programmes/curricula then, can be used by educators across the political spectrum. In analysing the political orientation of educational programmes it is more useful then to analyse the educator's aims and objectives and their relationship to social change.

A Theoretical Framework for Analysis

Thomas and Harries-Jenkins (1975) have proposed a theoretical framework to show the possible interpretations of the relationship between adult/continuing education and social change. The framework is based on two important and interrelated distinctions - the interpretation of social interests (conflict vs. consensus models) and the distinction between value-oriented and norm-oriented perceptions (as used by Smelser).

In the conflict-oriented model, adult education is seen as a radical force 'seeking to make a major impact on society', where effectiveness is measured in the degree to which it challenges basic assumptions about socio-economic structures, value systems and cultural or aesthetic norms. In this model, there is "total rejection of any interpretation of the objectives of adult education which identifies its goals with the maintenance of the existing social system" (p. 2).

In the consensus model however, adult education is seen as having no role as an instigator of social change. Existing structures, value-systems and norms are accepted as the framework within which educational activities take place. "From this point of view, it is not the primary task of adult education to challenge the validity of this framework, although such a challenge may arise as a concomitant of the transmission of knowledge and culture" (p. 3). Success or failure in stimulating social change in this model is thus seen as irrelevant when judging an educational activity's worthwhileness.

In addition to the conflict/consensus distinction, the authors also distinguish between value-oriented and norm-oriented perceptions. The former is concerned with changes in the generalised ends or values of the social order itself, while the latter retains these goals, while seeking to change "the rules that govern the pursuit of basic objectives and the detailed operation of basic forms of social order" (p. 3). This distinction is particularly important in distinguishing changes of a revolutionary nature vs. reforms.

Combining the two distinctions of conflict vs. consensus and value vs. norm-oriented, Thomas and Harries-Jenkins have suggested a continuum (Diagram 5) of the possible relationships between adult education and social change.

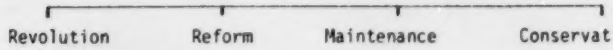


Diagram 5

The four possibilities identified on the continuum are:-

a. Revolution - aimed at totally changing basic structures within society.

b. Reform - also change-oriented, but more concerned with modifying selected aspects of the present.

c. Maintenance - based essentially on the idea of social integration, but consensus-oriented overall.

d. Conservation - a total rejection of change, maintaining the present totally.

With reference to the needs approach, this paper has sought to show that the approach itself is not inherently conservative but has possibilities for application by educators with widely differing aims and objectives. The interpretation and meeting of learners' needs can range from total conservation through to revolutionary programmes aimed at altering the basic structures and values of a society.

In deciding on the content of programmes and curricula for adults, many educators refer to the 'needs' of the learners. Whether they cover basic numeracy or the latest in surgery techniques, continuing education courses and programmes often seek justification in the claim that they 'meet the needs of the learner, or the community'. And yet, despite its ubiquity in continuing education, there appears to be little in-depth discussion of the problems and possibilities associated with the utilisation of this approach.

This paper has sought therefore, to examine people's needs as a basis for planning educational content. The first part of this paper reviewed some possible reasons for the continued popularity of the use of needs, particularly in reference to the unique features of continuing education itself. From here, the discussion reviewed the main types of 'need' as the term is currently used. Having then discussed in some detail a number of the problems associated with using a needs approach in planning, a model for gaining an overview of the process was then suggested and a brief case study was given to illustrate the process.

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